

Joseph Morse House (Stone House)

HABS No. NY-5603

South side New York Route 26, southwest corner of Mill Street

Eaton Village

Madison County

New York

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

JOSEPH MORSE HOUSE (STONE HOUSE)

Location: South side New York Route 26, southwest corner of
Mill Street, Eaton Village, Madison County, New York

Present Owner: Walter W. Mott

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Mott

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement

of Significance: In 1796 Joseph Morse and his wife, Eunice Bigelow Morse, came from Sherburne, Massachusetts, and settled on approximately two hundred acres near the Indian trail that extended from the Susquehanna River at its headwaters in Cooperstown to nearby Stockbridge. In 1802 they completed "Stone House" in the settlement called Log City, now Eaton. Joseph and his eldest son, Ellis, who inherited the property and "modernized" it in 1846, were responsible for a grist and saw mill, woolen mill, fire house, brick office, raising cattle, and flax. This practically self-supporting manor was the nucleus of Eaton Village. Wood, Taber and Morse (Walter Morse, son of Ellis and grandfather of the present owner) made the first steam traction engine. The house remains in the possession of the Morse family in 1974.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1802 built by Joseph and Eunice Bigelow Morse from Sherburne, Massachusetts.
- 1819 by will, Wills Book CX, p. 155 to Ellis Morse, eldest son of Joseph.
- 1869 by will of Ellis Morse to his second wife, Adaline Bagg Morse, and his children by both wives. All the children quitclaimed to Adaline at this time, Deeds Book 126, p. 31 and Deeds Book 615, p. 920.
- 1874 Adaline Bagg Morse by will, Wills Book P, p. 589, to all living children of both wives. Jane Morse, daughter of Ellis and Lora Ayres Morse, the only unmarried child living, occupied the house until her death in 1908.
- 1923 October 13, Adaline Morse Mott, daughter of Walter

Morse, who was a son of Ellis, became sole owner when the last quitclaim deed is recorded, Deeds Book 271, p. 108.

- 1923 December 7, by deed, Deeds Book 271, p. 235, Walter Webster Mott and Rowena Mott, children of Adaline Morse Mott became joint owners.
- 1946 by deed, Deeds Book 371, p. 102, from Rowena Mott for her share, Walter Webster Mott and his wife, Josephine Holcombe Mott, became the owners, who in 1963 also became the occupants. The house was vacant from 1908 to 1946, and then only occupied vacations and weekends until 1963, with restoration in progress during that time.

(Abstract, deeds and wills recorded Registry Office, Madison County Court House, Wampsville, New York.)

2. Date of erection: 1802
3. Architect: unknown
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: unknown. For 1846 alterations, some bills for lumber and supplies are in the hands of present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Mott. The A. Wood Iron Works made the ornamental iron fence that encloses the property.
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: The main house was originally a square native stone structure with a center hall running from the front door on the north to a door on the south. A stairway to the second floor went up from the front part of the east wall of the hall. There were two large rooms on either side of the first floor hall. In the northeast corner was a bedroom, a dining room in the southeast corner, a parlor in the the northwest corner, and the kitchen in the southwest corner. There was a stairway to a full basement under the stairway in the hall.

The second floor was apparently the same plan: four bedrooms and a center (north-south) hallway. No attic.

There was evidence from old floors that each room of the house had had an outside wall fireplace. Battlements were removed when the roof was raised in 1846.
(Notes by Mrs. Walter W. Mott)

6. Alterations and additions: In 1846, the oldest son, Ellis Morse, who had inherited the "home place" from his father, Joseph, remodeled the house. In a letter, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Mott, written April 29, 1846, by

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Adaline (Ellis' wife) to her "Aunt Dana" in Princeton, Massachusetts, she wrote, "We are now on the eve of great changes. Mr. Morse proposes . . . to make alterations on the house, to tear out chimneys and take down the battlements and finish with a cornice, remove the bedroom from the east end of the house to the west end and have folding doors between the two rooms on the south side, a piazza on the east end with four large columns [He] is expecting something like thirty men in less than a month from now and designs to prosecute with vigor until finished . . . "

They made all these changes as planned, and many more also. The fireplaces and chimneys were removed. A chimney was built between the northeast room (now parlor) and the southeast (now library) wall with a fireplace in the southeast room. In it is a Franklin "set in" with a handsome mantel and hearth. Unusual feature of the mantelpiece is a panel in the pilaster-like projection at either side of the entablature under the mantelshelf that contains a picture frame complete with glass for pictures of "latest dear departed," (according to Mrs. O. W. Mott). A chimney, that is now used by the furnace, was built from basement to roof on the west wall of the northwest rooms. The chimneys had stovepipe holes in all rooms to accommodate the small iron stoves provided in lieu of fireplaces. Four of the little stoves still exist.

East-west partitions were put up midway in the center halls on both floors. Downstairs, this south end of the hall was made part of the east and west rooms, the library and dining room, the south door being made into a window (under which is still a steppingstone with a foot scraper.). In the southwest room (now dining room) a stairway was built to the second floor and one to the basement, on the north wall. The west end of this room was partitioned off into two small rooms, one for a dish pantry with open shelves, drawers, and one cupboard with doors, and the other a dressing room with a door into the northwest room (now a bedroom). This room now has two doors and three windows.

The old basement stairs (under the front hall stairs) were removed and the space floored and used as a coat closet.

When the "piazza" was built on the east, a door was made to it from the south end of the east wall of the southeast room (now library).

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Second floor changes: The northeast and northwest bedrooms are unchanged. A door was made into the partitioned-off section of the hall (south end) and the east wall of this section moved farther east. A large closet was added to the northeast wall. A partition built north and east at the west end of the southwest bedroom made two small rooms (over pantry and dressing room on the first floor). The south one of these rooms is a small bedroom opening into the back hall. The north one is a nursery with only one door, which opens into the northwest bedroom. A stairway to the attic goes up over the stairway from the dining room (called by the family the "children's stairway").

As the letter said, "the battlements" were taken down, a wide entablature with iron grated monitor windows added, the roof raised about six feet, and a stairway and hatch built to the roof. The house had elliptical windows in the east and west gables, of which the west one remains, but the east one was removed (still hangs in the attic), when the roof was extended over the east "piazza." A room was partitioned off with a lock. Guesses as to its use are weaving room, herb drying room, hideaway, or what have you. In the attic the chimney from the library makes a 90 degree turn.

The "piazza" added along the entire east side is two stories high, and has four fluted Ionic columns set on large square stone pedestals.

The one-and-a-half story wood frame kitchen wing was added toward the south at this same time. A door, through the thick stone wall from the dining room leads into it, and it has a porch along the whole east side with a door into the dining room. The east room of this wing was the old kitchen, and still has the large, high fireplace with crane. It is made of handmade bricks, tile hearth, pine mantel and has high cupboards on each end of the chimney wall. A coat closet runs between the fireplace and north wall of the kitchen. There are three windows, and five doors: to east porch, to milk room, to stairway, to woodshed and to main house dining room.

Back (west) of the old kitchen in the kitchen wing in the southwest corner is the old woodshed (now kitchen). It had three windows, a two plank door with original strap hinges and latches, that leads outside (south), two large pine cupboards for hanging garments or tools,

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an old dry sink, a wall of wide plank with a door in the center into the "heater room", which is directly in back (west) of the kitchen fireplace, also in the northwest corner of the wing. It houses two brick "set stoves," one with copper and one with iron kettles (both large), and a large, covered brick oven with iron door. The milk room in the southeast corner of the wing opened from the south side of the old kitchen, had cherry shelves all around, painted plank walls and a door (west) into a small closet under the stairs. Narrow, steep stairs with a cupboard into the wall leads to the second floor of the wing.

Upstairs is a small hallway with a window, and four rooms: in the southeast corner, a small one with no windows, possibly a storeroom, with partial pine wall and door into the hall; a small southwest bedroom; a large northwest bedroom with a large closet; large northeast bedroom with a large closet.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: In 1796 Joseph Morse and his wife, Eunice Bigelow Morse, came from Sherburne, Massachusetts, largely by blazed trail, and settled on approximately two hundred acres in what is now Eaton, on the Indian trail that extended from the Susquehanna River at its headwaters in Cooperstown to nearby Stockbridge. A settlement first called Log City grew up here. In 1806 Log City became Eaton and the half-dozen log cabins were called one of the "cities of the new country."

Soon after completion of the house in 1802, a fire house for the estate and a brick office with iron vault for administration were built. A grist and saw mill was built on Eaton Brook, an orchard laid out, and farming, cattle raising, and flax raising with later a woollen mill on the Chenango River, east of the village, were Morse family projects.

The history of Morse House is a landmark in the early history of the village of Eaton, typical of the first settlements in this area. Ellis Morse, oldest son of Joseph, who inherited the house, built and operated a large distillery nearby. He was also one of the earliest public officers of Eaton. Henry B. Morse, a grandson of Joseph, used the Morse brick office to muster in the 114th New York Volunteer regiment for the Civil War.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: A water color of the house as it originally was built, hangs over the Library fireplace in Morse House, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Mott.
2. Bibliography:
 - "The Morse House in Eaton." Daily Bulletin. Endicott, New York, October 18, 1957.
 - Biographic Review - Leading Citizens of Madison County. Boston, Massachusetts: Biographic Review Publishing Co., 1894.
 - Whitney, Mrs. Luna M. Hammond. History of Madison County, state of New York. Syracuse, N.Y.: Truair, Smith & Co., 1872.
 - Smith, James H. History of Chenango and Madison Counties. Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1880. (Not considered by the family as reliable as Mrs. Whitney's history.)
3. Other sources: Mr. and Mrs. Walter Mott, descend nt and owners of Stone House.
4. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Further search and study of old letters, account books, etc.; further study of the structure of the house; reminiscences of family members and local people.

Prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Mott
and Dorothy Graves and Roger Heppel
Cortland County Historical Society
May 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An interesting "modernization" of a stone 1802 Federal style house to an 1846 Greek revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: Good

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B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Main House, 43'2", plus 8' porch, by 33'6", two-and-one-half stories, five bays. Wing, 28' by 27', one-and-one-half stories.
2. Foundations: stone
3. Wall construction: Native stone from the farm. Family history considers facing of front elevation to be Vermont stone brought by ox cart. Kitchen wing is wood frame, clapboard, now painted red.
4. Structural system: Main house, stone with plank interior partitions; kitchen wing, wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops: Two column entrance portico on north (front) elevation; two story Ionic tetrastyle Greek portico across east elevation-kitchen wing, porch with four square pillars under main roof of wing. Cellar entrance from outside on the south side of the main house.
6. Chimneys: Main house - central chimney (twisted 90 degrees in the attic to pass between rafters). Side chimney in west wall. Kitchen wing - central chimney with cooking fireplace plus a heater room in the rear with two "set stoves" and a large bake oven.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Eight-panel front door with semi-elliptical fan light, four-panel side lights extend down approximately two-thirds of distance from fanlight to doorsill. Recessed wide panelled door into present library. Six-panelled door in kitchen wing. Back kitchen door with original hinges and bolts.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Twenty-three windows, nine-over-nine panes (10" x 12"), shutters for all in Main House. Nine-over-nine in four windows, and six-over-six in three windows, of first floor kitchen wing. Second floor, nine-over-six in four windows, kitchen wing. Main house attic, originally two elliptical windows in gables, (one now); five grilled monitor windows in north and south entablature (now three missing grills on south side).

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable roof. Main house roof supported by hand hewn plus pit-sawn beams. Covering is now all modern asphalt.
- b. Cornice and eaves: Four foot wooden Greek entablature of 1846.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: Original square stone house had four rooms and central hall on each floor. There were outside wall fireplaces in all rooms. For 1846 changes see "Notes on alterations and additions" of Part I.
2. Stairways: Main stairway in center hall of main house has tiger maple handrail and square spindles. The enclosed "childrens' stairway" from the dining room goes to the back hall second floor, and one to the attic from this hall. A steep stairway in the kitchen wing to second floor.
3. Flooring:
 - a. Main house: New maple flooring on the first floor; second floor, random width pine, natural finish.
 - b. Kitchen wing: First floor, original plank in old milk room, toilet and the heater room (plus some flagstone); second floor, random width boards, painted.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Plaster, paint, wall paper. The plaster is old Rind full of hair, put on hand split lath.
5. Doorways and doors: Large front eight door panel. Eight-panel library door. Other inside doors of pier panels.
6. Decorative features and trim: Three-and-one-half inch trim on doors; four inch trim on archways.
7. Notable hardware: Kitchen wing - large hand latch on main door. Throughout the house, original handles, long hinges, original lock, bolt, etc.
8. Lighting: Modern fixtures. No originals.

9. Heating: Fireplace in Library added 1846; large pine fireplace in old kitchen with crane. Two "set stoves" and bake oven in "Heater Room." Still have four small stoves used after 1846 modernization. Now have base-board oil heat throughout.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation (by compass reading) and general setting:
The house faces north, pillared porch to the east on main house and on kitchen wing. Route 26, running east and west in front of the house was the original "Skaneateles - Hamilton Turnpike," built in 1806, in the procurement of which Joseph Morse was very influential. In his will of 1819 he bequeathed many shares of the Turnpike to his children. Later this road was the Georgetown Plank road and Ellis Morse not only supported it but actually worked on building it. The Skaneateles-Hamilton Turnpike started at Skaneateles (on old Cherry Valley Turnpike, now route 20), came east over Pompey Hill, New Woodstock, Erieville, West Eaton (then Leeville), Eaton (then Log City), over Cemetery Hill and into Hamilton. About half way between Eaton and West Eaton ($4\frac{1}{2}$ miles apart) was a thriving little settlement of mills (woolen, cashmere, etc.) owned by Morses and others, called Pecksport now but Alderbrook then. Here lived in "Underhill Cottage" in the early 1830's and 1840's Emily Chubbuck, who became the third wife of Dr. Adoniram Judson, the first Baptist missionary to Burma and who wrote the first Burmese-English dictionary (according to Hedda Hopper's column in the "New York News" recently (April '65); a documentary film is being made on his life. Emily Chubbuck was an author of fame of those times and used the pseudonym "Fanny Forrester." An historical marker points out the location of her home.
2. Outbuildings: Sketch map of the area herewith. Across Mill Street and on the northeast corner of Route 26 and Mill Street is the "Brick Office" on its half acre of ground. Built by Joseph Morse some time before his death in 1819 to serve as an office and a safe repository for his money and all the papers connected with his many business enterprises. The building is of red brick exterior, lathed and plastered within. It has two main rooms, the back one having a closet and a vault. The vault is as fireproof as it possibly could be made, with three brick walls, a millstone floor and a heavy iron door with an enormous brass key. A millstone also is in the front room with a wood stove on it. This

"Brick Office" was used by Joseph's grandson, Henry B. Morse, as the place to muster in the 114th New York Volunteer regiment for the Civil War. (Two of the original recruiting posters are in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Mott). From here the 114th met the other units at Norwich and distinguished themselves in the New Orleans campaign, Red Cedar River battles, and many others.

Another building, south of "Brick Office" on Mill Street, was the "Fire House," a small red clapboard building. The Morse family for many years provided the fire apparatus for the village: an old hand pumper and a hose cart (now given to the Eaton Volunteer Fire Co. and kept as curios).

A long barn (called the "Storehouse" in deeds) stood just south of the Fire House on Mill Street. It had been built to store the grain for the mills and distillery which were located just south of the property on the opposite side of Mill Street next to the stream. This barn was sold and torn down by adjacent land owners after the Motts took over the property.

The grist and flour mills (mentioned above) were built by Joseph Morse before he built Stone House (Morse House). The original mills are gone and an "Agway" mill stands on their site.

Ellis Morse (son of Joseph) built a distillery just east of the grist mill, and ran a very profitable business for many years. That building is gone.

Across the road (Mill Street) (north and east) from the mills is a stone wall of what was a cheese factory, also run by the Morse family (Joseph's sons.)

South of Stone House (Morse House) are several stone foundations, but no buildings, and it is thought that one was a large chicken coop.

The shed originally attached to the kitchen wing fell down from the weight of the snow in 1946. The stone foundations were left as walls and a lawn is where the shed stood. It was a carriage shed, with space for farm machinery, an eight hole "privy," and stairs to a loft, and it formed a three-sided enclosed yard on the east side of the kitchen wing.

Across the road (Route 26) on the north of the house is the farm, originally belonging to this property but sold many years ago. Several picturesque old stone walls and sheds are still in use, but in need of repair.

West on Route 26 is an historical marker for "Morse Mill Dam," built by Joseph Morse to supply water power for his mills down Mill Street.

3. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: West of the house was a formal garden. Many of the original trees are still there: a huge tamarack, several elms, group of fir trees (once trimmed to fancy shapes), a gnarled old crab-apple, a row of old spruce across the front (north), two old lilac bushes and a large and beautiful mock orange bush. In the spring this lot and the old orchard (still with two very old pear trees), just to the south, flourish with daffodils, narcissus, stars of Bethlehem and white violets. When the Walter Motts first bought the property, the garden lot was grown high with weeds and here and there were outlines of old paths (large, flat pieces of slate set deep with just the corners jutting out). The crowning glory of the garden was a fountain, 14 feet in diameter, six feet deep, built up of stone with an ornamental iron fence surrounding it. (Jutting stones and dangerous fountain pit are now lawn.) According to old pictures, the garden was surrounded by a white rail fence.

Prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Mott,
and Dorothy E. Graves
Cortland County Historical Society
May, 1965

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation of structures in the Southern Tier of New York State, undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Cortland County Historical Society and the Valley Development Foundation, Inc.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was prepared by Dorothy E. Graves and Roger Heppel of the Cortland County Historical Society. Architectural information was prepared by Ms. Graves, with the assistance of Mr. and Mrs. Walter W. Mott, owner-occupants of the Joseph Morse House, Eaton Village, New York.

JOSEPH MORSE HOUSE
(STONE HOUSE)

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Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher and were taken in April, 1966.
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